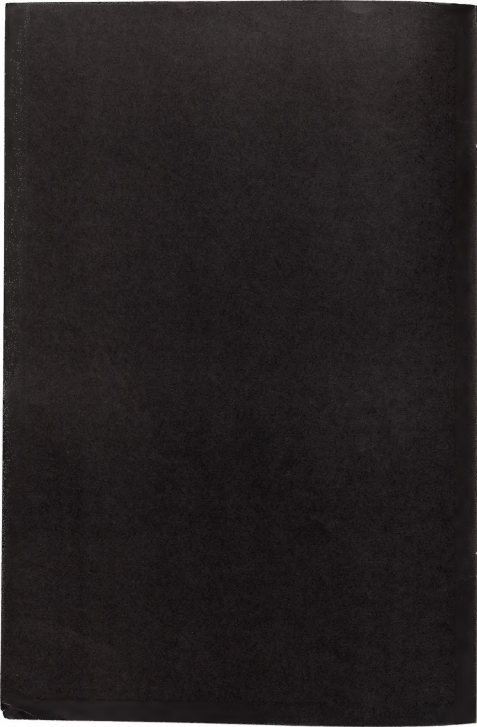


Emigre

No. 32

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# Emigre No. 32 / Fall 1994

ESSAYS, TEXTS, AND OTHER WRITINGS ABOUT GRAPHIC DESIGN

(some serious reading issues)

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ABOUT THE COVER

## "ou est non enigré?"

"Ou est non Emigre?" So read Laurent Seroussi's letter to *Emigre*. Due to a recent change in international mailing service, the delivery of issue 32 to our subscribers in Europe took longer than usual, and Laurent was getting agitated. To emphasize the urgency of his inquiry, Laurent had used a striking self-portrait that stared at me with threatening intensity from behind his written message. As I looked at the portrait, however, I couldn't help but recognize that Laurent had just sent us the perfect image to embellish the cover of our current issue. Time and again, like critical mass occurring, the perfect solutions to design problems seem to simply offer themselves out of the blue (or, in this case, out of Paris). I'd like to thank Laurent for granting us permission to use his self-portrait, and can assure everyone that *Emigre's* international mailing service has been restored.

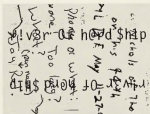
RYAN

## rebut

The writings on the previous page were composed by  
Emigre artist Ryan, who was also responsible for the  
"emigré" writing on the multiple posters that accompanied  
this issue. In this rebuttal, however, you notice, you are  
rebuttal not to the previous issue. To be exact, your rebuttal  
was not 100% true.

Yes, together with her partner Ruth Westphal, publisher  
Emigre, a network and separate field with some great  
writing experiences, look for making and creating  
for copies of future work in.

After, Michelle Smith, from 1994, New York, NY 10001,  
in couple and then to, so and they'll send you  
some copies.



Quoted from *Rebut*, No. 1, Spring 1994.

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An International Collaboration

VICTOR MAROULIN and CHRISTINE CELAND





**Keep the Exchange Afloat**  
 For Over Five Hundred Years, Banks

law suits? Copyright infringement? Didn't want to be grouped with Ai Hase and his gang? What is it, kupo? I'll love in shame until I know all the reasons.

Significance

David Anderson, Milwaukee, WI.

P.3.: I agree that neither Mammal is a necessary term (predicate for all those who have the animal skin).

Elliott, M. &amp; M. J. Smith

The main reason why we changed the name to Mazon is as you guessed. When we published Mazon in *Entrepreneur* 4½, some two years ago, people hardly took note. Then, AOL Radio started wearing Mazon T-shirts and the Spaghetti Accident CD was released (starring a song written by Mazon!) and the media went berserk. From that point on, no matter what reasons we came up with, people blamed us for trying to "cash in on the shock value of a counterculture pop icon."

It was sad enough that people thought we were glorifying Charles Manson, but to also be constantly grouped together with Al Rose. Together we made it all the way into Time magazine, made us decide to change the name.

I'm pretty certain that Charles Manson will inevitably become the "counterculture pop icon." Like Billy the Kid, John Wesley Harding, Jesse James and a host of other ruthless killers, America is quite adept at creating mythical heroes out of criminals, and *Charm* has no intention contributing to that. The fact, by the way, has always sold well, and once the name change it is still selling well. Obviously, and no surprise to us, the name of a don't has absolutely no bearing on sales.

Sincerely,

Ruth Sandstrom, Sacramento, CA.

F.E. (and) informs you about Wainwright. I'm so proud. He's one of Scotland's most prominent scientists, but rarely mentioned outside of Scotland.

### Summary of Results

When the controversy about the Manson/Mason name change arose, I was wheelchair-bound, traveling around Asia. Since Enigma was unable to contact me, they changed the name and informed me once I resumed from my trip. My first reaction was one of complete annoyance – how could they do this without asking me first? But then I quickly realized that this name change could be interpreted as taking the process of naming a typeface even further – it added a kind of subversion permanently bubbling under the surface of a seemingly simple relationship between the name "Mason" and the carved architectural nature of the typeface.

There's a terror in my mind of a parasite in a design studio eating the typelace. Maybe not knowing the real heritage of the name. Then somebody whispers in their ear: "You know, that typelace-wind is he called 'Harpoon'." How would they react to the virtual nature of the typelace knowing it previously had a different name? A name not in rice and innocence as they first thought? Would they clear it out of the computer immediately? Would they empower it with some kind of negative mysticism and become fearful of using it? Probably they would do nothing as it is after all only a typelace name. The original idea behind the typelace actually but how is an even more "alliteric" Zoom.

In response to all the people who complained about the name, when it was first brought to my attention I simply couldn't be bothered particularly since people weren't prepared to hear anything other than "irresponsible" "offensive" since I wanted to reply to the above letter about the name change, I thought I should reply to those who complained as well.

I vowed that all those who were alluded to by me naming a topside Massie were from America. Before trying to censor any mention of this mass murderer, I suggest that those people look at the faults in their society that allow for someone like

LETTERS FROM MICHEL COMTE, BOB COLE AND GUYANNE

Manson is aware media celebrity status. It is like putting band-aids on sores that are the result of internal disease – you treat the symptoms and not the problem.

If people honestly think that I'm stupid enough to name a typeface after Charles Manson because I think he is a great guy, then I have credited them with being more intelligent than they really are. The name "Manson" stood something to a group of visually and intellectually sophisticated professionals and was intended to make them think about the ideas that affect the way we design. In addition to using "This is a nice typeface and it relates to some naming." I chose to make people aware of the conflict of creativity/ingenuity and pleasure/beauty by giving aesthetically pleasing letter forms a name that is both elegant and horrifying. Many of the Museum letter forms were started as drawings I did in churches. To me, religion has many beautiful aspects, yet it also causes much pain and suffering. I didn't expect everybody to understand or accept all the reasons for calling this typeface "Manson" – as I said before, in it only a typeface. Engraving is a forum for putting forward ideas – sometimes, complicated or otherwise – for people to think about and react to. It is certainly not a place where one can gain extraordinary sales and fame just by being controversial.

Jonathan Burrows, London, England

Dear Brian,

All these talk about new technology is making me think about all of the forgotten technology. In an age of increasingly technological saturation and increased technical perfection, why are we still may use a collective term grasping so desperately to reproduce imperfection and the degraded? I cite the typeface Bownell and your recent release Backspace as examples of technological degradation.

During my study at Brown University, I was fortunate enough to take part in a course entitled "The Degraded Image," where we explored technological degradation through inherently – or relatively – low technologies. This has led me to consider whether we are just grasping for intimacy in an era of technological perfection. This is what draws me increasingly to typing – in many ways I see typing as the reintroduction of the hand into reproduction through technology.

On the other hand, the elimination of the hand from the work enabled a new emphasis on the conceptual – a giant leap forward. Perhaps it is just the Romantic-Faternalist in me, but I cannot help but be envious by technology. It is a part of me. Have you thought about these implications – Post Structuralist and Deconstructivist as they are?

Tracy Kline, Newark, CA, USA

Dear Guy,

As one of the "Old Turks" teaching typography, calligraphy and graphic design (at NYIT) for the past 30 years, I take pleasure in keeping up with the "Young Turks" (introducing Lisa Grigori) their new, contemporary concepts and design parallel with the classics.

While there is a great deal to read and digest in your publication and I am unable to read it cover to cover, one of its impressive aspects is that of your attention to detail. . . in short, types are rare. So, it is with regally pleasure I point out a unique pair in issue #31 (Part 2). . . possibly one of those mystical transpositions?

I may be more manual than digital, but continue to be refreshed and inspired by your content.

Sincerely,

Will Forrester, New York, New York

Dear Guy,

Greetings. I am responding to the recent "Raising Hives" (as was that "Hives") issue. I am a graphic design student, which makes me uniquely qualified to address an issue in graphic design, that of design education, as I am the victim of one right now. I found the descriptions of the programs at which your interviewees teach quite exciting, although I am not studying at any of the schools mentioned. (Which may be why I found them so intriguing, as it is my experience that education often differs radically between intent and practice.)

I should start out by saying that I honor the formal Swiss basics I have had, and recognize them as the cornerstone of my design education. But modernism is not the language our culture speaks anymore, and design is a radically different profession than it was 50 years ago. The types of innovative education featured in issue #31 seem to address that in a much more direct way than more traditional programs. No one knows where the profession will be in years. Design is in its own right becoming an art form, and innovation is the only energy moving the field forward. Who is better set to teach the future than those creating it?

Related to this is how students are taught for not taught, as the case may be to view design. I agree wholeheartedly with the interviewees, who asserted that by teaching purely formal issues, students are inadvertently taught to reinforce cultural assumptions that in many cases are loaded with invisible undercurrents and biases. Designers are in a uniquely powerful position as culture-makers, yet we are at best taught to be just sensitive enough to not offend too many people at once. I suspect we could have a lot more positive influence if we had a deeper understanding of our relationship to culture, both at individuals and as a society. It may not seem to be appropriate fodder for undergraduate education, but these are the people who are going to be the real practitioners with the most public impact. This is especially true for advertising, and let's be honest about the frequent crossover between design and advertising.

Lastly, I just have to comment on the idea that someone should be over 30, or have been commercially successful for a number of years, before they are qualified to teach. Wasn't the whole Modernist Movement introduced by a bunch of young rebels whose only experience was some wacky theater posters? So what if people are frustrated designers unable to find a commercial niche? I'd rather have as teachers when they are full of new ideas, energy, and creative vision than when they have settled into a comfortable style that works well for glossy annual reports and that has paid for their custom-made Italian suits. (Although I reluctantly admit that a good education probably requires both. Darn.)

With best regards,

Sam Gendry, Oakland, CA

## HITS SPACE AND ERROR'S POWER

In his introduction to *Design '92*, Rudy Vanderhaeghe comments, "It's curious...how much of today's design criticism focuses on the work of these so-called 'Young Turks.' It points out, quite rightly, that there is plenty of mediocre work out there in existence, so why pick on *Emigre* and *Design*?"

I think that he knows that the criticism that his magazine receives implies a compliment. However misguided, the design represented by *Emigre* is vital. If it is a mistake, it is one that opens possibilities and unleashes energy. It is theoretically sophisticated, creatively undeniable, and politically powerful. By politically powerful, I mean it is design with the power to convert.

I also think that *Emigre* disturbs people for reasons that are more psychological than aesthetic. A mostly functional criticism — "these are the wrong solutions to these problems" — would not suggest the vehement responses I myself have felt and that I feel under the gaze of people who criticize it. For instance, I think the new design simply makes people feel old and felt out. And that is always unpleasant, especially when you feel you may have missed opportunities for dissent in your youth. Those of us who spent our twenties creating ads in Minneapolis had our sensibilities headed in as by Ben Anderson and Tom McElroy, who in turn studied a flame started by Bob Gage and Ed Brodbeck.

For the first time in a long time, there is a recognizable younger generation of creative people with a distinctive aesthetic. It is especially maddening when the younger generation may not be literally younger than you — I am there-like — but may simply have apparently fresher ideas.

The anger is also aggravated by same-day-to-day frustrations. The new design — by which I mean different type, edge alignments, a distrust of standard four-color process, a rejection of grids, and a reliance on accident — undermines my professional confidence. Even though I am a writer, I have always felt comfortable — in the tradition of collaboration fostered by Brodbeck — to comment on design strategies, if not design issues. (I couldn't have my name.) But the rules of the new design shake me and its vocabulary intimidates me. "Quoting the Vernacular?" like Steven Heller, I always assumed that we were the vernacular. Consequently, I've found some of the work of my younger colleagues difficult to critique and hard to sell.

A third, even deeper reason explains some of the anger I feel toward *Emigre*. I love design because it transforms and translates the mechanics of daily existence. That is why I spend money on it; that is why I pursued a career that would put me close to it. In his memoir *Self-Destruction*, John Updike, who studied art before becoming a writer, described his early fascination with printing. The three-color that I allowed this summer by cartoon renderers and animation studios and magazine editors to assume within myself perhaps, it might be said, some inner defect that nothing within me and actual could fix. He then proceeds from

the psychology to the comic-strip logic: "My early renderings merged the notions of print, Heaven and Manhattan to map of which looks like a type shop." Bob Updike and I have intersected. For me at least, writing was an alternative to speech, not an essence of it. Design is a way to clean up the accident and contingency and ambiguity of speech and replace it with something more fluent. The renderings, orders and dream of the new typography make me uneasy on some very basic level. When I see design that seems to delight in messiness — "I am really interested in type that reflects...the imperfect language of...imperfect beings" (Barry Beck) — I feel subverted.

Despite all of the above, I find much to admire about *Emigre*. Much of your type does better express the significance of what is being said than more conventional systems would. You have faced the introduction of the computer while others ignored it. You have introduced unpredictability into design that had grown predictable. You have done something you believe in as financial risk you have refused to be intimidated by the need for an uncontestedly defined audience. You have affirmed that design is ultimately a human effort that cannot be codified, although I think that design was less formulaic than you made it out to be. (The rules I glimpsed in the spread from '83 captured in *Emigre*: *The Book* make the IBM standards manual seem whimsical.) And you have created some very beautiful things: fonts such as Democratic (Miles Newell), those great Whittaker House (Nickel) and Fellars (Ed Field), the poster for China Lake, to name a few.

Aside from my invasive dislike of "ugly design," my criticisms hold down to this: for an apparently radical magazine, some of your premises are very conservative. Diana Luke makes the statement, which is repeated in your type casting: "typefaces are not intrinsically legible; rather, it is the reader's familiarity with faces that accounts for their legibility. Studies have shown that readers read best what they read most." Doesn't this argue against new fonts? Readers can get used to them, but why should they? Other than a desire for expressiveness or a need to accommodate a technology, the only reason I can think of is that those faces are intrinsically more legible than existing ones. Unless expressiveness is more or clearer something intrinsically better, why bother?

I also question some of the questions *Emigre* from his newspaper experience. His argument, if I've paraphrased it correctly, goes like this: newspapers don't follow the classic rules of typography yet people still read newspapers, so we have more freedom to ignore the rules than we thought. People may well have read newspapers in spite of their bad type, especially if they contained information not otherwise available. Once alternatives such as television and *USA Today* appeared, traditional newspapers lost circulation.

In short, it feels like you are giving yourself permission to ignore old styles rather than a reason to create new ones. To some extent you have been very honest about this, citing your "own frustration to explain convincingly what...is good design." But I am interested to see what you come up with.

JOHN FOSTER, BOSTON, INC., PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.



# In and Around:

## Cultures of Design and the Design of Cultures

Written by Andrew Blauvelt

Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, North Carolina State University

### Part One

#### In and Around

The paradoxical nature of being both in and around is familiar to the cultural anthropologist, who might work in the field among the observed and at the same time remains apart from the observed. It is this observer status given to the anthropologist that creates this necessary dilemma. The conventional wisdom supporting the role of cultural anthropology has been its intention to study the cultures of other peoples as a way of reflecting on our own culture, or to borrow a phrase from Liberal Humanism, **To know others so that we may better understand ourselves.**

The situation between an observer and an observed can never be neutral, however, since the power relationships are inevitably unequal. The graphic designer shares a similar dilemma of being both instrumental in the making of cultural artifacts and living in the society through which they are distributed. Graphic designers are often asked to remove themselves from their social positions and experiences and offer themselves as professionals, specialists in the various forms of visual communication. This detachment, which we might call "professionalism" or "specialization," creates the mythical, autonomous observer in the design process. This is a learned method of being professional and a consequence of the problem-solving process at the core of every graphic design procedure. We are asked to be objective and to render rational decisions (solutions), and doing so places graphic design on a par with other professions. The graphic designer is, of course, a member of society and thus lives with the artifacts of his or her making, as well as with the artifacts of other designers. In this way, designers are asked to be professionals outside of (to be around) culture, and at the same time, to be a part of (to be in), culture.

We are, with others in society, witnesses to and participants in the consumption of cultural artifacts and, therefore, share in the moments of seduction and repulsion.

I am seduced by the messages of others.

I appreciate the materiality of the finely printed book.

I respond to the urgency expressed by the political poster ... and I shop at the mall.

I am repulsed by the messages of others.

I am appalled by displays of injustice.

I am threatened by the signs of hatred ... and I shop at the mall.

The important lesson of this confession is that we consume cultural artifacts and their messages in different ways. While we consume these artifacts in the conventional manner of conspicuous consumption, which renders consumers as passive, blank slates upon which all forms of messages can be written, more recent research efforts have demonstrated another dimension to this idea of passive consumption, showing that we also consume artifacts symbolically and

The relationship between self and others is a two-way street,  
producing effects on all parties within a power structure that is typically unequal.

Part One

## In and Around

even sexually through small acts of individual resistance.<sup>1</sup> I watch  
Melrose Place intensely, for the melodramatic plot lines and the  
obvious acting – it's so bad, it's good – while I resist buying cable  
television because that's just too much television.

### The Discovery of Difference

The dilemma of being both in and around culture enters at  
another level: at the level of individual subjectivity. The phrase "in  
and around" constitutes a subject position, if only a paradoxical  
one. Just as a subject position will only be meaningful if it is  
defined in relationship to other positions, so too is the subject of  
that positioning. We need other things to mark the boundaries  
of ourselves, our identities and our cultures. Psychoanalysis tells us  
that this process happens at a very early age, when the child  
recognizes itself as a self that is in, so, as an individual, and also  
recognizes others as others. Similarly, cognitive psychologists have  
suggested that we learn predisposed at the earliest ages to recognize  
difference, the exceptional, as a way of making sense of the world  
around us.

This process of differentiation continues on a social level through  
identification with race, ethnicity, gender, age, religious affiliation,  
sexual orientation, class, etc. These social and cultural positions are  
defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. We find  
that we are culturally constructed as subjects and we are socially  
constructed through the identities we claim or the categories we are  
placed in. It is easier to understand that class is a social construction  
but harder to consider how race is a construction, and not simply a  
natural phenomenon, until we realize that the idea of race emerged in  
a historically specific way, bolstered by the truth claims of science  
for various political ends. Race is not natural, it is cultural. Gender is  
not natural, it is cultural. These statements are made to counter the  
extent to which ideas about women, blacks, gays, etc. are so  
intertwined in the fabric of society as to appear inevitable and  
unquestionable – natural.

The relationship between self and others is a two-way street,  
producing effects on all parties within a power structure that is  
typically unequal. This discovery of others – that moment of  
first contact between different groups and their subsequent  
relationships – has been characterized by the French philosopher  
Jacques Derrida as essentially violent: "...the anthropological  
war [is] the essential confrontation that opens communication  
between peoples and cultures, even when that communication is not  
proceeded under the banner of colonial or missionary oppression."<sup>2</sup>

This violence occurs at the level of actual, lived experience and  
at the level of symbolic resistance, through words and images (i.e.,  
representation).

Derrida's relationship with cultural identification is a very  
ambivalent, that is to say, fundamentally significant one. The "discovery" of  
various cultural groups within society coincides with their delineation  
as an audience and as a market. It is no coincidence that Big Business  
"discovered" other audiences after the social turmoil of the 1950s  
and 1960s: the Civil Rights and Women's Rights Movements to name  
but two. We are, in fact, witnessing a renewed discovery of cultural

6. The new classic example drawn from work of popular culture is Ben Aug's  
Watching Dallas, first published in the Netherlands in 1987. Aug gathered re-  
sponses from women by placing an ad in the Dutch women's magazine *Viva*, ad-  
dressed to those who refer back to watch the American soap opera *Dallas* or  
decided it. Aug discovered three general positions toward the program: one  
group of fans, a second set of viewers who watched the program critically and  
a third group who hated the show. Aug's work demonstrates that the consump-  
tion of cultural artifacts (in this case watching *Dallas*) is a complex negotiation  
involving sometimes the wholesale acceptance of the show's message (by fans),  
sometimes an outright rejection of such debased messages and meanings (by  
haters) and sometimes an inverted re-reading of the show's message and mean-  
ing (by critics). Aug's work is important because the consumers have pleasure  
in produced through consumption, in complex ways with contradictory value sys-  
tems, rather than seeing consumption as simply an end in and of itself.



7. "The Battle of Proper Names," from Part II: Nature, Culture, Writing in *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida, 1978, p.167. Derrida's comment is in con-  
text of a discussion of the "Writing Lesson" by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-  
Strauss. The linkage between violence and representation is fully present in  
this allegorical image of "America" by Philippe Galle in the late 18th century.  
The New World is rendered as a naked, violent woman. Why a naked, violent  
woman?

## In and Around

diversity under the banner of multiculturalism, a phenomenon that is reflected in "progressive" advertising campaigns.<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, many of these campaigns are for fashion clientele, contributing to the notion that such "diversity" is "fashionable."<sup>4</sup> In our discussions of others in this culture, it is hard to imagine a sickness that is not a product of larger economic forces. This applies to the economic development of colonialism that brought slavery to the New World and with it the foundations of racial supremacy, as well as to today's effects of global capitalism which turn those old feelings of supremacy into longings for control, even lustlike contact with others—their diets, clothes, language, music, crafts, customs.<sup>5</sup> It is this longing for contact with others, their exotic appeal, which drives the desire for cultural appropriation through cultural appropriation.

Draping the Other:  
The Digital Fusion of  
Jana Constant

This "discovery" of cultural difference through the recent game of multiculturalism can be seen in a fall 1993 issue of *Time* magazine entitled "The New Face of America." Created as a special issue and devoted exclusively to issues surrounding what we now call multiculturalism, the publication effort was sponsored, exclusively, by Chrysler Plymouth Corporation. From the cover: "Take a good look at this woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several races. What you see is a remarkable preview of the New Face of America. New Immigrants Are Shaping the World's First Multicultural Society." We learn inside that this new woman is a composite creature created through the digital "morphing" process, representing specified awareness of ethnicity: 15% Anglo Saxon, 17.5% Middle Eastern, 17.5% African, 7.5% Asian, 15% Southern European, and 7.5% Hispanic. Later we consider her some sort of ethnic-techne Frankenstein, we are told that this woman stole the hearts of several magazine staffers, obviously unaware of her virtual existence. Of course, it doesn't take a comic to realize the fallacy of asserting that today America represents the world's first multicultural society. The history of the world's oppressed would sap

the advent of "multi-race" advertising has produced a bewildering amount of information on the consumption preferences and buying patterns of various ethnic groups. For example, we now know that Korean Americans consume more Spam than any other ethnic group or that Chinese Americans drink more Cognac. In the words of one reviewer, "Today's marketing is pure ethnic policy."

The most visible of these campaigns is the ongoing "United Colors of Blood" one.<sup>6</sup> A useful analysis of Brewster's is made by Jeff Brown in his article "New Advertising Multiculturalism: Brewster and the New Cultural Beliefs," *New York Times*, November 1993, pp. 18-25. The crucial difference lies in how the concept of multiculturalism will be allowed to exist as a force in society. Will multiculturalism act as a force for substantive change or how we deal with others (cultures)? Is it to be seen as a form of marketplace pluralism? Or is it simply a reflexive response period for the marketing of our race? In the reported words of Brewster's creative director Olivero Toscani, "Freedom, change, respect, acceptance." Or as Brown notes, "Brewster has a backwardly images change, good over capitalism."

"The commodification of differences has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more exotic, more satisfying than sexual wars of drug and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes sport, something that can be worn up the doll shop that is mainstream white culture," Jeff Bockel from "Taking the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Codes: Race and Representation*, 1992, p. 21.



Time Magazine, October 1993



Time Magazine, October 1993

Part One

## In and Around

In a similar vein, the magazine *Calvo* sponsored by the Italian fashion corporation Benetton, in a spring/summer 1995 issue devoted to race, offers a six-page version of digital "possibilities." In these pages, celebrities are transformed, much like Ted Turner's coloring technique, creating a "black" Queen Elizabeth, a "black" Arnold Schwarzenegger, a "white" Spike Lee, an "Asian" Pope John Paul II and a "white" Michael Jackson. The absurdity of these "possibilities" as reality creates the humor that makes us laugh. These possibilities do not represent any lived reality but a mythic realm where we see how elusive the outward boundaries of "us and them" rest through the wonders of digital imaging.

Our fascination with others has been rehearsed by anthropologist Michael Taussig, who turns the table on the observer and the observed. Taussig asks "Who is fascinated by what?" when he questions early anthropological expeditions and their use of the camera and the photograph to make contact with and record other peoples. In Taussig, "the more important question lies with the white man's fascination with [the non-white] fascination with these technologically capacitated machines [the camera and the photograph]." Similarly, we need to ask ourselves who is served by the wondrous potential of digital imaging to translate pictures of race, ethnicity or gender? Who are these images for?



Photo: spring/summer 1995

5. "The Talking Machine," in *History and Memory: A Particular History of the Senses* by Michael Taussig, 1993, p. 155.

"The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained - ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other."

*The Problem is the Message*, Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore (1967)

Over a quarter century has passed since this prophetic about our technological relationship with others by media guru Marshall McLuhan. In the racial turbulence of the 1960s, McLuhan saw the impact that increased information exchange would have on racism, particularly on our relationships with other people. Tinged with the optimism that permeates all technological revolutions, McLuhan expects a message of civic responsibility - an ethics of mutual dependency.

Fast forward to yesterday. "Our critics felt that Matt Mahoney's work changed the picture fundamentally; I felt it lifted a common police mug shot to the level of art, took us outside to truth. Reasonable people may disagree about that. If there was anything wrong with the cover, in my view, it was that it was not immediately apparent that this was a photo illustration rather than an unaltered photograph to know that, a reader had to turn to see another page or see the original mug shot on the opening page of the story."

James H. Jones, *Washington Post*, June 4, 1994

This statement was a defense for the use of Matt Mahoney's digital photo-illustration of S. J. Simpson for *Time*. Ten years later underscores the relationships among electronic technologies, representation and cultural identity and the many issues their convergence raises. There are many instances to recall memory of the manipulation of photographic images by digital technology, such as the head of Syreth Winston - body of Ann Margaret collage for *TV*.

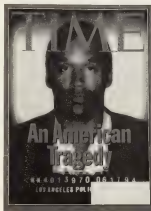


Photo: Jones 1994

We need to ask ourselves who is served by the wandrous parental of digital imaging to transform pictures of race, ethnicity or gender? Who are these images for?

Part One

## In and Around

Guide to National Geographic's shifting of the Great Pyramids at Giza

which stirred numerous public controversies over the myth of the truthfulness of photographs.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the O.J. Simpson cover, Time decides to use as its defense the argument that the illustrator transcends the original mug shot photo, and becomes art, thereby placing it in a special cultural category reserved for suspended judgments, a place where my taste is not yours, yours is not mine, let's agree to disagree and other relativities that seemed to have been inherited from the "I'm Okay, You're Okay" '70s. By placing this commission in the realm of art, the editor can argue that the artist who created it (or rather re-created it) gave it something it lacked. Two lack scores, of course, because of the kind of image it is — a mug shot. Justification for Nabarro's image hinges on displacing everything we know about the social significance of mug shots as documents of suspected criminals and re-reading the image as an intervention of the artist's hand and eye, thereby elevating the commonplace mug shot to the extraordinary realm of art. The greater or large and largely negative reaction to this image occurs at a level of understanding about how images are conceptually framed in society. According to Time management, detractors didn't read the image "correctly" as a work of art, but rather as what it is, a technological alteration of a mug shot — a photographic document of criminal surveillance.<sup>3</sup> What was read, at least by some, was the watermark of Simpson's show time, which shows that some grasped the fact that this was not the "original" because it did not conform to what they knew (mostly from other pictures) about O.J. Simpson. It did not correspond to the truth. The re-creation of a police mug shot, 90B440,3870 06 17 94, into the red frame of a Time cover, trades our abstract belief in "innocent until proven guilty" for the tacit knowledge of accused guilt. The retelling re-creates issues several other social messages: the story of a fallen public figure ("An American Tragedy" reads the cover) subconsciously translated in many minds as the verification of everything they think they know of black males and criminal activity.

This news controversy is but the latest episode in the so going struggle for representation in our culture that is dressed in the high-tech cloak of digital imaging, while revealing the same old social truths. McLuhan saw a social epiphany but lacked critical insight into the social reality that forces individual options that seek to operate in opposition to established social truths.

What is interesting to me is how new digital technologies have been harnessed for representing racial possibilities. These either furrows populate the world of cyberspace or ways that returning others used to reside in the mind, moving away from imagining the other to imaging the other. Unfortunately, little has changed in the perceptions of race, only the spaces in which they are articulated. The representations of other cultures have moved from the conspicuous colonization of stolen and battered objects found in the curiosity cabinet and the natural history museum to the

sociocriticism of appropriating cultural representations, including

the creation of yet another "other" — a fictive one you can't know because it doesn't really exist.

It is this aspect of ferociousness that demystifies the use of

<sup>2</sup> For an extended account of what he calls the "pseudo photograph," see William J. Mitchell's book *The Unsettled Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (1992); in particular, the chapters "Stressful and Artificial" and "How to Be Things with Pictures."

<sup>3</sup> For a critical account of the use of photography in the service of documenting criminal activity, see "The Body and the Archive" by Allan Sekula, reprinted in *The Gender of Meaning: Critical Essays on Photography* 1999.

## In and Around

digital imaging techniques to capture and fix the image of the other. Photography has been consistently used to "capture" others, particularly in the field work of anthropologists or the surveillance of police. These photographic exposures have their own level of concealment but always remain true to their claim **to capture reality as it was.** These recent uses of digital imaging techniques, however, relinquish their claims to reality in favor of **picturing reality as it isn't, or what might be.**

The latter dilemma of the digital construction can be seen more eloquently in another Color's (June 1994) depiction, a portrait of former President Ronald Reagan with skin lesions new to an obituary citing his recent death from complications with AIDS. The fictitious photo and obituary rewrite the Reagan-era myth on AIDS and extol the virtues of a man who "is best remembered for his quick and decisive response to the AIDS epidemic," under the headline "Reagan." While at great pains to establish a level of reality for their story, Color's declares the fictitious nature of the story in a footnote and uses the word "manipulation" in the attached photo credit. These are offered to prevent undermining the story as true, while trying to preserve the negative legacy of the story itself. Again, the absurdity of the story plays havoc with the reality of its presentation.

Unfortunately, we are left with the **Wishful thinking** of the obituary and the all too real historical record on the subject.

The fictive fantasy of digital "possibilities" seems so appealing because they offer as a form of pleasure through their refusal of a known reality.<sup>4</sup> The ease with which such productions are made is in contrast to the difficulties of easing racial conflict or ending political apathy towards the AIDS pandemic.

As a counterpart to these instrumental uses of digital technologies by mainstream media is the use of similar technologies by British artist Keith Piper, whose video installation "Surveillances. Tagging the Other," deals with the use of that technology within the climate of European racism. Piper appropriates the slang terms of



Keith Piper  
Atlas de Portraits, 1993. The "Norman" Piper's Head

"tagging," the marking of territory to a unique graffiti signature, and applies it to the use of electronic technologies to mark and track others. In this way, Piper shows how, for example, a proposed new European State could utilize digital technologies and information networks to target racial "undesirables" and keep them under surveillance. Piper's digital images function a distinctly 21st century vision of documenting and analyzing cultural differences in much the same way as 19th century phenologists probed the bone structures and facial features of others, particularly the "Oriental" and the "Negro."

Keith Piper's use of the same technology creates a different digital focus as

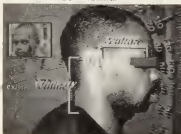
one you fear because it might just



Color's, June 1994

4. This thought parallels some of the conclusions of Ben Agger (see note 1), who argues that fantasy and fiction do not "function in place of, but beside, other dimensions of life (social practices, moral or political consciousness)." "It is a source of pleasure because it puts 'reality' in parentheses, because it constructs imaginary relations for real contradictions, which in their factual complexity and their simple familiarity step outside the obvious complexity of existing social relations of dominance and subordination." (p.175)

Video still from Surveillances. Tagging the Other, by Keith Piper



Although many people consider the issue in terms of sheer numbers...  
the issue is not necessarily a lack of representations but the diversity of them.

# Part One

## In and Around

### Picturing Difference/ Representing Diversity

We come to know ourselves and others less, often through actual contact and more usually through representations in society. Cultural identification is a factor of representation. For example, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, speaking about the concept of woman and sexuality, said it is essentially "images and symbols for the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the woman. It is representations, the representations of feminine sexuality, which conditions how it comes into play."<sup>10</sup>

The debates about multiculturalism are debates about representation. Although many people consider the issue in terms of sheer numbers, a quantitative approach to representation, the issue is not necessarily a lack of representations but the diversity of them; for as the art critic and theorist Craig Owens reminds us: "In our culture there is, of course, no lack of representations of women or, for that matter, of other marginalized groups (blacks, homosexuals, children, criminals, the insane, etc.)."<sup>11</sup> Representation can be depictions of others as a kind of shorthand that we substitute for specific cultural categories. The effect of the linkage between dominant political rhetoric and the use of various representations can be seen when we caulk our wholesale categories that are themselves amalgamations of sex, race and class, without imagery. For example, what image do you form for

### WELFARE MOTHER

### CRACK ADDICT

OR

### AIDS PATIENT

?

These code words are the cultural shorthand for young, unmarried, poor, African American women; young, poor, African American men; and young, white, gay male respectively. Their power derives from their ability to encapsulate media images of these scenarios in the minds of the public without drawing attention to their ideologic, racist and homophobic roots.

### Picturing Race/ Voice and Agency

The debate on representation for the graphic designer seems to reside in the space between Karl Marx's empowering dictate, "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented,"<sup>12</sup> that is to say, art for others, and Gilles Deleuze's categorical rejection of such presumed authority - "the indignity of speaking for others."<sup>13</sup> Marx's famous dictate is the more typical task that artists and other cultural producers have assigned themselves:

to speak for others.

Let's typical is the statement by Deleuze that suggests, perhaps,

letting others speak for themselves.

The negotiation of representational strategies seems central for the graphic designer (and others) who are routinely asked to speak for others. Graphic designers and other cultural producers are just beginning to rethink the terms of representation, away from speaking

10

"Leading Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality," by Jacques Lacan in *Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Juliet Mitchell, 1982, p. 92.

11

"The Indignity of Speaking for Others," in *Imaginary Subjects*, by Craig Owens in *Groundwork: Representation, Power and Culture*, 1992, p. 262.

12

The comment is from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* in a discussion of the French peasants. It is discussed by Owens (see note 10), who adds: "Here, Marx uncritically assumes the traditional role of politically oppressed or repressed or alienated in bourgeois society: he appropriates for himself the right to speak on behalf of others, setting himself up as their conscience - indeed, as their consciousness itself. But in order to occupy this position, he must first deny them their full consciousness, the ability to represent themselves." (p.261).

13

Mitchell Foucault, "Interfictions and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 1977, p.299. This statement by Deleuze about Foucault's work comes from Craig Owens's essay (see note 10).

## In and Around

for others and towards speaking with and to others.<sup>14</sup> The factors that would allow others to speak for themselves deal with access to the means of representation that is ultimately a function of power. The debates around multiculturalism can be seen as a struggle for control over the means of representation. As Craig Owens states, it is representative itself that takes away the ability to speak for oneself. However, the struggle in representation will not end since it is fundamental to the operation of our society. So, while increased instances of represented others (fracturing) inject some provocation into the picture, they do little to replace the previous exclusions. Fundamental change is unlikely to occur through the pages of multinational corporate advertising no matter how many others are depicted. After all, have you "Come a Long Way, Baby"? Fundamental change is much more likely to come at a broader social level through a multitude of changes from any number of sources and inevitably it will be reflected in the construction of various representations, made by graphic designers and other cultural producers and ultimately incorporated in the communities of identities. After all, corporate advertising campaigns are taken representative. Even the black, the Asian, the woman in the school do not create diversity but merely reflect it.

The work of socially engaged artists, artists and designers tries to undermine the stereotype in innumerable ways through disruptive strategies such as appropriation, subversion and violence, as well as

the destabilizing tactics of deconstructive textual readings and demystifying widely held views.<sup>15</sup> True subversion, as a result of empowerment or agency, includes access to the means of producing cultural representations and to the means of their distribution in society.<sup>16</sup> In this way, the voices of others will be heard only when those others have access to the larger public sphere.

While graphic designers may claim an independent status, like that of neutral observers, we find that their role is a far from neutral one in the context of representation. As producers and consumers of various cultural artifacts, they are understood as both tangible goods, such as books and magazines, as well as the more intangible products, such as ephemeral messages and images; graphic designers find themselves both in and around culture.<sup>17</sup>

14

Independently, designers are discovering that roots of cultural diversity and social responsibility can be found in their own back yards. As I write this, the premiere issue of *Spoke* has arrived at my desk, a publication by the World Social Foundation. The second issue of the Foundation is therefore, to "examine the role of cultural identity in the design disciplines," to "collect and disseminate information about social projects in the global creative community" and to "encourage projects that empower individuals and communities to participate in the shaping of their environment." While their intentions are laudable I am left with an uneasy feeling. Perhaps it's cynicism, maybe it's the fat-wreck-like design that makes me suspicious, or maybe it's the \$58 subscription price. See the brief report on World Social, *J.D. Magazine*, November 1993, p. 26.

15

It is easier to see the work produced by artists in instances of "others speaking for themselves" and in the process building another voice to be heard. I think of Carrie Mae Weems, and African American women, whose photographic series "Aunt Jellies" evokes titles such as "Black Woman with Children" or "What are the three things you can't give a Black person?" or of the Native American artist Jamar Durkin's work, both of whom undermine the prevalent stereotypes produced by and for dominant culture. It is harder to see this activity in the realm of graphic design proper, much of which is produced by and for dominant cultural interests.

16

1988 (AGE 18-197) Anonymous designed flyer produced on a photocopier and distributed in New York City schools.

17

In what is the answer? The problem is multifaceted and much larger than design, which means we need a variety of responses on a variety of levels. It helps to remember that we are both designers and citizens. In this way, you can be part of a solution even if you are not designing for it. It also helps to remember that graphic design is about messages, and that our solutions are merely contributions to a larger effort.

There must be greater cultural diversity in the people who design, including an analysis of why these people are not there now. We need greater critical awareness that the teaching and practice of design occur in larger social frameworks, governed by rules of racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, etc., particularly for those individuals who may not experience it themselves. We need a greater range of methods and spaces for practicing graphic design that begins to step outside of a reactionary response to problems with its remedial, piecemeal (step-down) structure and towards a more holistic, responsive process found in activities like, for example, collaboration and co-authorship. Much to the disappointment of many, these issues will not disappear with the arrival of "political correctness" since they reflect a fundamental social change that has been underway for quite some time, no matter how clear it seems in coming for the rest of us. Once simply, design has no choice but to get used to it.





# Breathing Through the Body of A

## A TYPOGRAPHICAL APPROACH FOR THE FUTURE

Written and constructed by  
A R Z A A A C H E R A

### Introduction to A

...

If it is written in no language it is written in no body

DOWNLOAD FOLIOCARD

Free file

### Typography of A

...

Writing knows nothing of the present.  
The first word breaks with the past in order to form  
origin, the demanding future

DANIEL JORDAN

(From The Book of Design)

A is everything. A is all. A is the all beginning.  
Here, A has become the body. A is breathing.  
Look, A is alive, and A cries out,

"I am Aisen!"

A lives in the lang of language  
the lang's intellect released onto A.

A's own language, its alphabet redefined  
Simplification: a loss of letters in flourish  
leave now from letters says the A of breathing.  
leave all breath previously requested in positive cultures,  
all letters unworthy of the lang of A

Go C, go F, go H, go J, go N, go O, go U, V, W, X, Y, and Z.

All ancient be gone.

be born unto the dust of your own frivolous tongue flapping  
Live the document of A, the breathing body of A,  
given here as said of the rules

O single page dug up breathing this

"A corresponds to the first symbol in  
the Phoenician alphabet, where  
it represented not a vowel, but a breathing."

These words alive,

these Goady words,

dug from the depth of a lung beat

The Goady-father of Aisen

...



# Breathing Through the Body of A

## Epigraphy of A

How earth uncovered the body,  
the suffocating body of A  
How so more unjust treatment shall pervade,  
the power of A, unseen, unknown  
The body of A, alive  
How the inside shall work its way out into breathing,  
only breathing in thoughts in this future  
If this is my lung, then this is my breathing alphabet,  
my lung pulled out alive  
Tack me onto the letter alive  
Make the breathing  
Make no more words be known but breathing, but A  
All other infantile extremities sloughed off as human waste  
Let out the C in a wild yet peaceful cough  
Fart out all F's, ultimately  
Squeeze out all the hate of H as monstrous waste piles  
Shoot any last ounce of jam to the death of J itself  
The very remains core ejected in the oblivion numbers of N  
Quit out of any O left behind quirky  
Every last drop of urine forcibly applied to the uselessness of U  
All vile emities exorcised in the form of V pos  
The very notion of waste scraped out with wisdom  
leaving no W behind.  
Expel, without doubt, any mark of X  
Spell the boring yawn of Y  
Kill Z frankly in the infectious ferment of zoea  
All other body parts singing to A,  
the lung song lifting up in marvelous paths of breath  
All central given over to almighty lung life  
The continued extermination of the floral chart  
Other frivolous letter forms, shall be attended to  
as necessary, by the lung proper  
Certain waste, such as shot,  
always negating the lung as life  
The leukocytes guarding lung pests  
Shovel in hand, the damping  
keeps the alphabet moving, keeps the breath alive in gusts  
Sail the wordsmith smooth and horizontal  
Sail next door's lung life  
If any sound, be it the breath of A,  
be in the breath of A in all extremes  
So Case So Greek, So Roman So Gothic So Adobe  
So in the end, so A  
The sound of letters only there in A, the sound of breathing  
The breathing alphabet as continuous as life itself  
Live the alphabet in columns of A  
Inscribe the A here and live, breathing  
So complete in this life,  
the breathing A



"Pack my box with A's breathing"  
says Gaudy

Pack the sewer box with the bodies of B, P, and R  
Pack them down.

Two too breaking template applied

Live the last of letters breathing down your neck

Lettered body parts indicating breath ports

No more limits to mouth opening

My fists open

Fists closed in waste products

Stinky fist gone down

Lavely fist open in the breathing part

Enter the breathing port alive,

let life

Live in the A life breathing.

See up the breath port with plenty of A

Bigger P song strangled out in the life long

Gaudy's eminence cut as early as Rome in A.D.

The breathing beginning as early.

The A lifting up only now in verse

in a long poem breathing the life of A.

Live a life in the box open

...



Goady says

"The stone appeared as a long form,  
as a baby R breath "

Goady says,

"The inscription is breathing "

Goady says,

"Within the molding 3 lanes feet 9 inches high "

Goady says,

"9 feet 1/4 inches long and alive."

Goady says,

"With R lettering in 6 lanes of long life "

Goady says,

"Almost filling the free space of my open lung, my living lung "

Goady says

"The letters in the two upper lanes  
are bifurcating into lung life."

Goady says,

"Each about 4 1/2 inches high,  
those in the next alveoli so simply "

Goady says,

"Two lanes 4 1/2 inches,  
on the fifth lane branching open but to urge."

Goady says,

"4 1/2 inches, and in the last line the alveolar sacs unfold "

Goady says,

"3 1/2 inches are the small scrolls and respiratory details divide."

Goady says,

"Carefully formed  
the thin or hair lines should be fully inflated  
to float in the air of R "

Goady says,

"About half the thickness of the thick veins  
will evolve beyond the trachea,  
southward  
into the lobes of R "

...



Breathing Through the Body of A

He sees a letter at the base of the Trojan column,  
breathing  
He sees the lang of A working  
More hammers,  
picks and more fine brushes  
The true parasites boozing A,  
searched

Regeneration of letters and their dismissal  
He plays up the kidney's K passing daily through U  
Come back as oxygen in C, P, N, O, V, and X  
Come back into the C life of breath come  
Come back F never falling focus  
Come back noxious in the sight of N  
Come back gutting as equipped as Q  
Come back spewed V in a vile of venom  
Come back X is a ray of bones  
Come from yore to know the hard lung of today  
Come today a lang in the body  
Flesh the A amorphous  
The body saying,

"No saying a quick look back can't be the body parts of me,  
my A."

All words hatched from A,  
flushed out from it  
O embryonic A taunting the breath begins  
No longer tongue use,  
no tongue,  
simply a gone day  
Only breathing,  
only A  
All tongueless A's breathe forward,  
full of breath  
The lang immortal of living language  
A, here now

Epigraphy of A





## Norm and Form

on the role of graphic design in the public domain

By Hugues G. Beckrand

This article is a response to a request by a committee of the European Association of Designers for the development of a common, multidisciplinary approach to the design of the public domain. It is a response to a request by the European Association of Designers for the development of a common, multidisciplinary approach to the design of the public domain. It is a response to a request by the European Association of Designers for the development of a common, multidisciplinary approach to the design of the public domain.

Translated from the French by Hugues G. Beckrand

In "Strukturwandlung der Öffentlichkeit," the German philosopher Habermas sketches the historical development of the public domain in a number of European countries. He outlines an ideal model of this domain in which decisions regarding public matters are taken on the basis of arguments rather than of status, power or tradition. This is clearly a prerequisite for the functioning of a democracy. The public domain is the medium in which the arguments are formulated that ultimately underlie political action. The quality of the arguments and the number of participants in the debate are crucial in determining the democratic level of the decision-making. A specific form of communication turns out to be the one most suited for a democratic system.

In his historical sketch, Habermas indicates who formed the basis for this early public domain: the city burghers. They were wealthy and educated and shared the values of a certain lifestyle - bourgeois culture. So only a limited segment of the population was involved; women, the poor and children played no role in the debate. The burghers controlled the material and other conditions for taking part in this debate. At once owners of capital, participants in a common culture and keepers of the relevant information, they turned the public debate into the exclusive preserve of a particular social group.

The question is whether the actual public domain achieved between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries can continue to serve as a model in the twentieth century. Not only has the number of participants increased dramatically, but the nature of public debate has changed. It is no longer carried on or mainly carried on between equal citizens but between the representatives of organizations who make use of increasingly complicated information and media networks. Ownership of the economic machinery has been divorced from its management - the so-called managerial revolution. The internationalization and increased scale of the economy alone ensure that the classic model of public domain cannot be retained. But it is not only economic powers of decision that have gained independence from the bourgeoisie: the same is true of the production of knowledge and information. Bourgeois culture has long ceased to be identical with capitalism; the bourgeois lifestyle is no longer rooted in positions of economic power. Bourgeois values such as thrift, lack of ostentation, etc. have become antithetical in a culture of conspicuous consumption. In his novel "Andersbrecken," Thomas Mann shows how the early bourgeois culture yielded to the new capitalism that took over in the second half of the last century. In sociology, it was Max Weber who described the end of Enlightenment ideals: the society of rationally thinking, speaking and acting citizens ended up as a bureaucratized state/society that subjected its own citizens to its administrative procedures. In "Zivilisierte Unmündigkeit," Max Horkheimer and Adorno outlined the working methods of a culture industry that constantly and professionally manipulates the behavior of the masses. In their number view, in the twentieth century the masses who had become politically aware were robbed of this awareness by

being permanently embedded in a mass culture in which entertainment and fun took the place of pleasure, culture and knowledge.

Graphic design is a young discipline. As an independent field, it is related to the rise of modern mass culture and opposed to it. Graphic design came into being as a by-product of the development of modern mass communications - as an autonomous professional function between the creation of text/image and its printing and circulation. Its object is the form in which all kinds of information are presented. As an independent discipline, graphic design is tied to the decline of the bourgeois public domain as described by Habermas.

The profession originated at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. It emerged from law, rather than high, culture. As a producer of images, the poster designer gave a banal treatment to themes and techniques from painting to meet the needs of business and the entertainment industry. As the arranger of information, the graphic designer applied architectural design methods to two-dimensional work. At the same time as this new field of commissioned work was developing, book design became the domain of those graphic designers who had made the traditional form, typeface and page forms of the Renaissance book, the standard.

It is remarkable that both traditional book design and the new typography were at odds with the reality of the print media that dominated the field of communications at the beginning of the century. Dutch Traditionalists wanted to see a revival of the bourgeois culture, which had achieved its finest form in the seventeenth century. In the Dutch version of Art Nouveau (known as "Nieuwe Kunst"), a new feeling was given expression in a curious amalgam of traditional forms and a new idiom. Obvious examples include the furniture that Van de Velde designed for his own use or for high-minded clients such as Oudena, and the design of the volumes of poetry published by Kluwer and Corter. The specialized book designers retained the classic outward form of the book while trying to extend its range to include the masses (from the "Arbeitsbildung" of



social democracy to post-war ideas about bringing culture to the people. They tried to reaffirm the central value of the book and the library as the seat of the collective memory at a time when the real foundations of the survival of society were to be found in the anonymous, innumerable archives of bureaucratic institutions. They refined the outward appearance of the book at the point when it lost its dominant position as the repository of knowledge and medium for argument. They were concerned to defend not only the book's form, which was threatened by mass production, but also its function in society. They were upholding the rights of a humanist tradition. One of the central figures in this movement, the scholar and typographer Stanley Morison, displayed a sharp awareness of the political significance of design from his "Politics and Scripts", in "Four Principles of Typography" (1925), he describes the role of the graphic designer as a servant of society. The designer makes himself invisible and obeys the rules that centuries of experience have found to be valid. Surrounded by the new media, Morison was a proponent of "the European tradition of the written and printed word". The forms of this tradition may be adapted only to the extent that this is necessary for modern technology. By definition, the designer has nothing at stake; he has no artistic interest of his own in the forms he creates and is simply the intermediary between text and reader. An ethic of self-effacement, dedication and service lies behind Morison's celebrated book, which became the standard work for the Traditionalists among graphic designers. He is appalled by the idea of autonomy or artistic design. Respect for the text and the reader is at the heart of his concept of professional integrity. Design is a service to society. The strategic objective of his definition of design is the realization, on an extended scale of the model of public domain as shaped by bourgeois culture. He rejects the reality of the mass culture of the

Marras and

1010

early twentieth century in the name of a tradition to be restored or updated.

The Madonnists were as  
less averse to the  
communication practices  
current in their day.

However, they tried to create new forms for the new contents of contemporary culture. New content and a new audience - the urban masses - received new forms that

would adequately reflect the spirit of the age. From the beginning, they took account of the new production methods: the machine and technology were the natural parameters of their formal vocabulary. But they also had a different society in mind. Their experiments with form were meant to anticipate a new material and non-material culture. Their prototypes were intended to complicate new social relations. Their products were to be suitable - in due course - for mass use. They also rejected the idea of personal motifs for designing, at stake was the collective interests of the masses excluded by bourgeois culture. The high expectations of a new society lay behind their ethic giving first place to collective interests. Thus, an ethic of service was common to the Modernists and the Traditionalists, as was the tendency to put their ideals into practice in Utopian communities or small groups. This is not the place to go into the complicated process by which the proposals of the avant-garde in art and design had their subversive element removed. These proposals were implemented in circumstances that were entirely different from those the avant-garde had anticipated. Their innovative forms were integrated into a capitalist culture that continually renewed itself. The avant-gardes were neutralized, assimilated - reduced by money and prestige. Salvador Dalí was renamed 'Avida Dollars' by André Breton. The moral integrity of individual participants in the avant-garde movements could not prevent its degeneration under Stalinism and capitalism. Caught in the web of the new fields of town planning and mass communications, most members of the avant-garde lost their individuality.

When Postmodernism became dominant in Dutch graphic design around 1980, designers could let their hair down. The strict rules of both Traditionalists and Modernists were overturned - anything went.





The designer's personal pleasure was central to the philosophy of Bradis Dumber, a leader in this new movement. Respect for client and public gave way to an attitude that gave priority to the aims of the designer. A certain disdain for the external conditions of the design was accompanied by a concentration on the formal possibilities available to the designer. What disappeared was the relation of the design to the public domain, however defined. The designer as a specialist serving public interests had gone. The designer's frame of reference had narrowed down to the world of design itself: what was his/her relation to the established norms in that world? Fame and fortune became acknowledged aims of design activity. The norm of design became the positioning of the designer. If we look at the attitudes to design held by architects and graphic designers or students in these disciplines, several categories can be distinguished:

*the theoreticians.* They are text-oriented. They are more interested in philosophies and theories about design than in design itself. If they practice design, they prefer to work on the basis of theoretical ideas or concepts. Among architecture students, Tishkink and Kuseman are the popular figures at the moment, and Heidegger and Berride are widely read. Theoretically inclined graphic designers are interested in texts on the role of design with a social or cultural slant.

*the handymen.* They are manually oriented. They focus on the material and the form it creates in the encounter with the properties of the material. They want to let the materials speak for themselves and to bring the form back to the essence. Naturalness in form and material are high

priorities. They attend workshops and have a real interest in the craft aspects. Cut and paste is back in favor with this group of graphic designers. What matters to them is the pleasure of form, but form without fills.

*the designers.* They are visually oriented. They search for the image of the age. They find it in cinema, magazines, on the streets and in museums, at video festivals and fashionable events. Their working method is usually collage - combining existing images to create a new one. They are sensitive to trends and reduce the design process to image invention.

*the critics.* They use the methods and tools of design but for strictly subjective purposes. They are concerned with their own preferences in form and image; they aim to create an image of their own. They express themselves without regard to communication or pragmatic concerns.

*the technophiles.* They are fascinated by the technical aspects of their discipline: the materials, the constructions, the new design tools. The graphic designers in this category are Apple freaks.

In all these cases, design is made independent from commissioning and the use of the designs realized. If evaluation is desired, in his inaugural address "Beeldende kunst: begehoud of verscheppeling naar de architectuur?" of 4 November 1992, Jaan Leering pointed out the general tendency towards autonomy among young architects - an abbreviation of the overall responsibility they bear towards society. His observation is confirmed by the typology I have outlined. None of the five categories relates to the practical world in which designs are initiated, realized and used. The social context of design is placed, mathematically speaking, outside the brackets, the communicative meaning of a design eliminated. This means that for graphic designers, the profession's right to exist is in jeopardy.

In reality these attitudes are forms of resistance to or attempts to escape from the way the commissioning relationship has developed. Increasingly, design commissions are given by professionals mandated by the commissioning body. Nor do the users come into the picture these days. The result is that the commissioning body's definition of the public is adopted. The designer's subjective nonconformism leads finally to indifference to and maintenance of the status quo, which is accepted as the natural framework of professional activity. The possibility of transforming social reality (or parts of it) through long-term, well-thought-out design strategies is outdated.

It is exactly when students or young designers adopt a "critical" approach that this conformism becomes all too apparent. The critical content is taken from official ideologies, such as anti-racism, feminism or environmental awareness. These are all - at least in one part of the world - state ideologies accompanied by penalties for breaking the laws derived from them. Personal experiences as a source for design is generally lacking in the treatment of these subjects, which is heavily dependent on images put out by the media. The result is often a collage of dilettant games; in contrast, the "critical" designs are full of good intentions and permeated by officially encouraged patterns of thought.

What is the nature of a graphic design ethic now that it can no longer, as it could until recently, rely on the vision of a social

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# ROUTE 666

TRANSgressing  
THE  
INFORMATION  
SUPERHIGHWAY

BY PUTCH TU

## When I was 8,

I fixed a toaster that all others had given up on, including my much older brothers, all of whom were or would soon be engineers. It could have been that the mere fact of taking

THIS  
STORY IS TRUE

it apart and putting it back together one more time had done the trick, or it could have been that going strictly on the visual patterns the wires made, I had seen something not quite right and repatterned it. In any case, we used that toaster for another few years. No one ever mentioned that I fixed it—that was taboo.

In fact, I got quite a verbal whapping for playing with "dangerous adult things, things that could hurt" me. Where I had a great deal of pride in fixing the thing, sharing that fact at the dinner table led only to disaster. They just

thought I was a dumb little kid who wouldn't know any better than to stick bobby pins into a light socket. I got the scolding of my life, and my brothers wouldn't let me near their tools and gizmos again. I wondered what sin I had committed, considered essential to our mornings, and all I got in return was disbelief and verbal abuse.

It taught me a valuable lesson: take my knowledge underground, play with Satan, and never tell anyone. Secretly, I continued to fool around with my brothers' Frankenstein-looking test tubes and soldering irons and oscilloscopes, obsessed with electricity and the cool moving visuals it made. I took electronics in high school, veiling my real interest in the subject by claiming that as the only girl in the class, my potential for more dates was greatly enhanced—this somewhat ameliorated my status as class freak.

Later, back in the days of punch cards, I was still fascinated by the visuals, but the shit I had to deal with from the boys in class, now heady with adoles-

cent testosterone poisoning, didn't seem to be worth the time or the time to fuck. I began instead to be overwhelmed by my new desire for a motorcycle.

That's more or less how I ended up on the so-called Information Superhighway, riding a Ducati instead of a mere "powerful" Hag, or an ultra-fast Japaneserotch rocket. I adore its nervous, high-pitched whine, and it is good to my thighs as they wrap around its warm, vibrating engine. I still keep my knowledge veiled from the boys, not so much because I'm afraid of their uncontrollable and bloody little primate urges for domination, but because they are rarely worth the effort.

# Or so goes the ideology of the post-industrial military complex.

ROUTE  
66

## It's no mistake

that the metaphor of a highway is used for the "Information Superhighway." Just as the roots of much of the computer technologies lie in the military, so the interstates were funded and built following World War II, for "national security." One of the distinguishing design parameters, for example, was the ability to handle tank traffic.

Route 66 is among the most fondly remembered icons of a squeaky clean America. You know, the black-and-white, mostly white, America where justice always prevailed in old Perry Mason episodes. It was also the path for something else that consumed America: the Dream West ideal, the hope for a better future, for unbounded possibilities, the American dream taken to its western fringe. For Route 66 simply concretized in

modern asphalt the wagon train paths to the west. The Chicago-to-LA road still exists in driveable fragments, its rusting vernacular signage a venerable encyclopedia of American Mythos: the land of cowboys and Indians, the Grand Canyon, cheap petrol and winged horses, and early nuclear test sites. That was back when we had a good deal of hope for a bright future, which we pinned for had pinned for usl onto the nuclear enterprise.

That American dream soured, turning instead into an irrelevant dystopia. The Hapi, whose lands are now horrific sites of uranium mines and cardboard and scrap metal "houses," recall their 2,000 year old (probably more ancient) prophecy that pretty much describes "spiderwebs in the sky" and

a nuclear apocalypse in vivid detail. Snoopy's scruffy uncle, Spike, comes out of the desert, out of the city Needles every so often, looking as though he had more to do with the city's name (we're not talking cactus here) than what Charles Schultz had in mind. It was aptly named though, as the last town one hits before the LA megalopolis. The City of Angels often shows up on our TV screens now with little reference to wide boulevards lined with palm trees, beach parties, and glamorous movie stars that characterized it from the days of early cinemas to the recent past. Our contemporary images are of smog,

endless traffic, earthquakes, a city afire with "racial unrest." Like the question put to the replicant in "Blade Runner," LA's historically seamy underside lies like the struggling turtle, belly-up, baking in the blazing Mohave sun. Where mam and pop restaurants lined Route 66, mini-malls and McDonalds now replace them, quality assured, or absurd. I dreamed of getting my kicks on Route 66, for it represented an America that is forever out of my reach in the Never-Here Land of being a hyphenated American, the product of emigre parents, someone strung out between the yuppies, who gave the promise of capitalist one more abusive kick, with the supposed lost Generation X. For all of their engaging accents and old world charm, my parents, addicted to relentless CNN broadcasts in their retirement, find America always obscene, an absence I revel in. But I take comfort in their salty, smelly fish in the same way I take perverse comfort in the safe sterility of the McDonalds' oases, one of this country's most effective of melting pots,

homogenizing the hell out of any purported diversity, doing in America what Coke does globally.



## NATURAL BORN KILLERS

The Information Superhighway  
substitutes another vision for the place  
Route 66 once held in our collective  
unconscious.

Upon it we are supposed to project our hopes and fears,  
provoked almost daily by our friends, the Media.  
Instead of dreaming West, we are nudged to dream out into  
yet another final frontier, Cyberspace.

Like the American dream, the playing field is supposed to be  
equalized there, more level than those of the Old World.

The democratization of information.

Free and equal access for everyone. A new, user-friendly Utopia.

The problem (and not the only one) is that, surprise, those  
who create and control and define cyberspace are scheduled to  
become quite a minority at the turn of the century.

Perhaps this is the last gasp of a group in their death throes,  
salmon who swim more furiously in their urge toward spawning,  
their urge toward

death.

Every year, I realize my dream. I ride my  
enjoying the winds that blow emptied and  
the best of both worlds though. I bring m  
America's decrepitude, one of my less ex  
net anywhere, everywhere, to find the on  
cafes of Route 66 displaced as listservs  
few people living their Stone Butch Blues  
Pakistani hotels.

I was raised in one of those extended families you  
only read about, mostly by my grandfather, because  
the women were always busy over steamy stoves, pick  
ling smelly fish, changing diapers, hanging laundry  
outside despite electric dryers. My grandfather came  
from a remote, mountainous place in the world that  
to this day remains highly inaccessible. That part of  
the world has a fairly substantial shamanistic hang-  
over, combining those beliefs with a form of Catholi-  
cism, much like the Mexican caranderos. Grandpa was  
trained as an herbalist, a healer who would burn  
feathers around me when I was sick and make  
strange gestures with animal parts, chanting in the  
lowest range of his voice, barely audible, in a lan-  
guage I hardly and always understood.  
Grandpa often sang lullabies to me as he tucked me in,  
and only now do they seem peculiar. My favorite was a  
warning to a "stara baba," an old woman. In rhyme, the  
lullaby warned the woman to always be cautious, even

Ducati through the decay of Route 66,  
decomposing icons in my face. I get  
y powerbook along in the land of  
pensive of addictions. I jack-in to the  
ce weird motels and curio shops and  
and chat channels, and more than a  
in CSpace, in virtual truckstops and

an old age, lest she wind up like a pig, dead, in a dry  
riverbed. It was no ordinary cautionary tale, howev-  
er, as the lullaby made clear that there was really  
no escape. If the wolves and were-creatures didn't  
get you, Government Brother eventually would. I  
always recall this lullaby whenever I see a road kill,  
and still wait to meet other Americans whose fami-  
lies taught them to apologize to the road kill, both  
for its senseless death and because humans killed it  
but would not do it the favor of eating its flesh. A  
road kill's life was a pathetic, unrealized one, a car-  
nion's ignominious destiny of being consumed in the  
struggle between maggots and big ugly birds.  
A road kill was responsible for my first trip up  
Route 666. I stopped to photograph a particularly  
beautiful road kill, a deer with an outstretched

tongue but without eyes, when I saw the sign demarcating the road of the devil. It was a joke, really.

I just wanted to see where Satan's highway would take me, to see whether the run-down stores with hand-painted signs would make some aside reference to it, play off of it, capitalize on souvenirs. An offshoot of the original Route 66, it is a short, two-laned road that runs north from Gallup, New Mexico, through Cortez (as in the Conquistador), Colorado, terminating in Monticello, Utah. It runs for what seems forever, straddling the lost and ancient civilizations that lived in Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde, Canyon de Chelly and Natural Bridges. The northern terminus isn't far from where the Hialeah in the Wall Gang and Butch Cassidy hang, near the Biblical rock of Moab. You won't find any signs marked "Route 666" when you actually traverse it—photo ops are limited. Most are probably stolen, or maybe the locals take them down, like the old hippies who live in Bolinas. Or maybe they just take them down because they still believe in god there.

They speak another language on Route 666, an idiom not much different from anywhere else in bumfuck USA. I know it well. I grew up learning to despise it, yearning for the values of an urban center that I'd only see on television. It doesn't surprise me that Oliver Stone chose Route 666 for Mick and Mallory. The landscape is emptied out of what you'd consider American towns and people and technology, as though

We thanked Sparky before we killed him, cut him up, and had him for steak one winter. It horrifies our more urban relatives that we would actually know and slaughter our own food. They find it shocking, repulsive, that it didn't come wrapped in plastic and Styrofoam, lying on what looks like the same absorbent material they use for menstrual pads. Mom pickled Sparky's tongue as a delicacy that Christmas, and finally

didn't care that I photographed her in the kitchen, up to her arms in viscera.

Disembodiment is a big deal in cyberspace. Meat (physical bodies) are nearly despised, or considered incidental. I don't really understand why the Cartesian mind/body split accelerates in CSpace, takes a firmer hold, if you will. It's as though these guys have never experienced the sensation of disembodiment in meditation or drugs or a really good fuck. It probably has to do with the physiognomies of the nerds.

I mean, even the acclaimed heroes of the Brave New World adhere to the stereotype, but as older, balding, heavier versions, with bad haircuts and lack of discretion in clothing, spectacles, and grooming habits. It's no wonder they want to leave that behind, but why replace it with the ideal of a metal he-man? The stud-mobles of the future, as depicted in television and film and cartoons, quite especially when associated with technology, are prime specimens of a laughable and dubious need for physical strength. When it all comes time for a showdown, it isn't between simply-faced nerdbrothers who can outprogram each other into oblivion; no, it is inevitably a physical struggle. Still, it is nearly disturbing to encounter the dissonance of a Fleshmeet once you've known someone for a long time in CSpace, and that's when

I start to wonder about Benjamin's aura.



Terrorized by the past, tyrannized by the future, they would rather recreate the world than play with the rest of us.

My brothers are in the late stages of a deferred mid-life crisis. One works for a shrinking aerospace industry. Another deals with nuclear waste, designing ways to limbed small bits of it into pea-sized bits of glass, to be buried in remote places that no one cares much about. Probably along Route 666. He could tell me where, he says, but then he'd have to kill me. Affectionate humor, he says. The last brother gave up altogether, and lives in the woods, because he doesn't need to deal with people there.

Despite  
flamewars and stalkers  
and the shrill scream  
of a masculinity  
that needs to redefine itself,  
despite everything, there  
are still dirt roads in CSpace,  
where the rest of us live.

I travel these roads nearly all of my waking life, and lately,  
into my dream-time as well. I am addicted, mostly.

It's a cheap and convenient repository for my angst and  
self-loathing, my greed for wet, hedonistic pleasures,  
tempered by paranoia of meat-borne viral beings.

It fulfills my need for consuming the interstices of  
adventure and agency, cloaked, without needing to fear the  
predators of the night, without needing my gun.

So with the Ducati and the warm pulse of electricity,  
the umbilicus of technology moist between my legs,

I travel,  
to sin and sin again  
on the  
Information Superhighway.



The end



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## Beyond the Margins of the Page

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Written by

H A R R I E T M U R L O U

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### THE TRICK CULTURE

THE 20TH CENTURY differs from the 19th by its secularism and freedom from the sublime awe of Nature. Ours is predominantly a scientific age, one that has seen the illusions and myths of previous periods debunked and replaced with an ever-expanding repertoire of certitudes. Still, though myth-making has retreated from the centers of culture, it is alive and well in the margins, where it plays a vigorous, though often unperceived role. Since science has cornered the market on explanations of the natural world, myth has taken up residence elsewhere. It is ensconced in the narratives, the stories, not of origins, not of our physical place in the cosmos, not of other lives and other worlds

conceptual and perceptual waters.

### SCIENCE HAS TRAINED

SCIENCE HAS TRAINED its analytic methods even on the making of narratives, on storytelling, and in general, on the medium of communication — language — demonstrating that it too, like morality, like the psyche, gender, and race, is not a "natural" phenomenon, but an evolved, constructed thing, susceptible to perpetual modification. The search, in culture at large, in economics as well as in science, literature, art and design, has been to understand the mechanisms of communication. The genesis of every form of culture is inextricable from language, making

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### Distance

beyond this one, but of *this one. Here*, in all its immediacy, its nearness, as it comes into and goes out of existence before our very eyes.

### FROM THE JOURNALS

WHEN WE LOOK into the distance, the horizon appears closer to us than it did to earlier cultures. Ours draws closer around us. Space and time are compressed. Around-the-world is no longer far. The moon is near. And beyond that, beyond our solar system, beyond our galaxy are others, so often visited in thought, that they have become familiar. Familiarity itself is now the material of myth-making. The familiar is deepening, revealed to be not a surface, but a volume. We ourselves, wedged between near and far, are the objects of myth. We exist, somehow, somewhere, between the infinitesimally small and the infinitely large, and from this place, navigate through

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### Language

language the primary, the most essential ingredient in the making of culture. Thus, an obsessive preoccupation with language characterizes our century — we long ago rounded the "linguistic turn," and have entered fully into the "linguistic age."

### BUT THE RESULTS

BUT THE RESULTS of focusing science on language are quite strange. Language, it turns out, is an opaque domain. Like inquiries into human perception and the structure of matter, it resists revelation. It defies common sense; it defies rational interpretation; it even defies non-rational methods and expressions which, intending to disrupt meaning, inevitably create it. It keeps the upper hand. It is, almost by definition, myth itself. Given the incorrigible independence of language, Barthes's comment that language speaks us

is accurate.

AND INDEED

our linguistic home is quite immense and capable of remarkable adaptation and versatility. For each semiotic increment that paces us along the diachronic scale, overtones of meaning resonate like musical chords along the synchronic. We attune ourselves to the subtlest variations, analogous to tones of voice. We "hear" the difference between "dog" and "cur." To that difference a psychic place corresponds. Our linguistic consciousness has even structured what was once thought to be the sole province of sight – the image. Images are language first, and visual data, second. We "read" them, arrange them to fit the schemes with which our language has fitted us. Language is the structure that our psyches' take.

THE 20TH CENTURY

obsession with language draws an even tighter boundary around each of us. We are creatures that speak and read and write. The most extreme proscription allows us no other worlds than those which language harbors. To be human is to be linguistic. No more, no less.

In a linguistic age,

just what is graphic design?

How do we describe

what it does,

and what are its consequences?

From whence does its authority come?

How does it communicate with clarity to a given public?

How does it govern the content of its message?

As a ground for these questions

what narrative

of graphic design history

can we construct?

THE TERM

*graphic design*, as distinguished from, say, architectural design, is linguistically tied to the Greek origin of

writing. The term "graphic" derives from *grapho*, which originally meant to scratch, scrape, or graze. These purely phenomenal or physical actions referred to the scratching of clay tablets with marks understood as outward signs or expressions of internal states. They are records of verbal transactions and an early form of writing. Since the alphabet had not yet formed, neither had the modern distinction between word and picture. *Grapho*, "to write," meant equally to represent by lines, or marks, or pictures. Thus, at this early stage of development, word, drawing, painting, picture were all forms of *graphics*. Word and image were not yet differentiated.

GRAPHIC DESIGN IMPLIES

a conscious manipulation of the quasi-verbal, quasi-visual elemental scratches and scrapes of writing. In current practice, the verbal and the imagistic still blend. Today's graphic designer carries forward the magic of the earliest scribe and earliest inventors of language – with one eye on the word, and the other on the image, they blur the boundaries between them, and from within the clearing where the verbal and the visual now spar, now embrace, draw meaning to the surface. The letter, the word, the sentence, the page, is treated as a purely visual gestalt independent of, though still mirroring, the significance of the word, sentence, paragraph, page. Or conversely, the image is treated as a strictly verbal element, playing a syntactical role and able to represent a thing as strictly as any word designates its class of things. The *graphic* designates the trajectory along which meaning moves, curves, twists, doubles back or orbits, plying its course under the twin influences of both verbal and visual forces.

#### THE DESIGN STRATEGY

THE DESIGN STRATEGY of an icon, a poster, a book, a sign, is the visual counterpart to what the writer calls "rhetoric." Graphic design is visual rhetoric meant to persuade, to convince, to move, to mobilize, to affect behavior. It manipulates the *graphic* to focus a message in a shifting field of multiple meanings. Of all forms of language, it is closest to mathematics. Like mathematics, it attempts to give *one* meaning to each of the terms that form its statements, in order to banish ambiguity. Like mathematics, it does this through the patterning of its elements and conventions. To design a graphic means to provide, in visual/verbal form, a demonstration, a proof, or an argument that persuades that its message is *x* and not *y* or *z*.

#### WHATEVER WE ARE

WHEREVER WE ARE in the world, we must forge a correspondence between something written and something visual, and from these signals, plot our course. We may choose the type of terrain we wish to navigate, whether watery or earthy. And we may choose a direct or indirect itinerary. But at each point there is a correspondence between word and image. They form each other, and form our relationship to whatever is other than us. The physical world as it appears through our senses, and the linguistic interaction with it, are the parameters of communication that can never be circumvented.

#### STILL, WE MAY ASK

STILL, WE MAY ASK: Do we "read" the word in the same way we "read" the graphic image? What is this process of mining the depths of a word and depths of the image? Both images and words do have depth — each constitutes a three dimensional matrix that envelops the human mind. And each is in continuous motion through time. Each is

historically and culturally contextual and perpetually recontextualized.

#### THE MEANING OF

THE MEANING of the word "time" has altered through time. The meaning of "history" has a history. Time flows differently along the banks of the Ganges than it does along Madison Avenue. History expands and contracts, varying in density, even in an individual's lifetime. "History" might "unfold," or "unravel," or "repeat," or "flow," or "circulate." "Time" might be a line or a circle, a spiral or a turtle, an expanding sphere or a contracting star. Words might be magical, sacred, might be able to conjure demons or predict fate. Words mediate between gods and humans, between the neurotic and the shrink, between the press and politics, between the individual and the public. Every word is an empty vessel, perfectly general, free of all particularity, the perfect projection screen that takes on any degree of specificity. The actor with shaved head becomes the generalized human capable of any personality. The word, "dog," assumes the personality of any cur or bitch tearing at your ankles.

#### THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER

THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER is the giver of mathematically precise personality to linguistic messages. The word is an empty vessel only in the abstract; that is, only until it is dropped into a verbal or visual field. Once it forms on the page, or in the mouth, it fills, like the body of a musical instrument, with resonating meaning. The graphic designer is the composer of the visual/verbal field, the provider of structure for a message to be both unequivocally delivered and unequivocally received. The graphic designer orchestrates the weight, the charge, the value, the interpretations of the

individual component and elements of the message.

And what  
of the possibility of  
successful, unequivocal  
communication?

IMAGINE THE FISHERMAN

IMAGINE THE FISHERMAN standing on the shore and casting a line into the ocean. Imagine the immensity of the Pacific and the inconsequential frame of a human being. What an astonishing act; what an absurd image. To expect to catch something under these conditions is almost pathological. The odds of success are apparently minuscule. The pursuit of meaning is an even more astonishing act as we cast into a vastly

experience of both. Entering into a message, s/he must proportion the significance of the word and charge of an image, and s/he must with pungency and conviction guide both their delivery and reception. To engage the *graphic*, in the loftiest sense, is to orchestrate the passage of a message into public meeting places, and when embodied, must itself become an agora, or sidewalk cafe, or piazza — a powerful graphic is an occasion for vital dialogue, and potentially, is a catalyst for cultural change.

TO PRACTICE GRAPHIC DESIGN

TO PRACTICE GRAPHIC DESIGN is to write the *graphic*, the word/image. In practice, it is an exclusively public form of writing — the

greater ocean. It requires a type of faith, because even when communication is apparently successful, it can never be guaranteed to be so. When do we know that an individual or group of individuals has understood the same thing by the same linguistic act? Only when, collectively, they agree that this is so. By coupling word to image, the designer may enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity, and thereby lead the audience into the necessary agreement that they have been addressed by (nearly) identical messages.

TO BE EFFECTIVE

TO BE EFFECTIVE, the designer must compose both the sending and the receiving dimensions of a message. Word and image must augment and complete each other. The role of the graphic designer is therefore a synthetic one. Standing at the edge of ocean and land, the designer's task is to convey an

graphic designer writes in public and for a public. These piazzas and cafes are the places where cultural content circulates, and so are inevitably charged with all the obvious and hidden qualities that give a culture its character. This character is a continuously shifting landscape onto which the graphic design is overlaid, and like a picture frame, or a sheet that drapes a chair, creates a recognizable form that fleetingly organizes a message in the endless flow of the close and the familiar, though unseen, shrubs and boulders, that suddenly accented, resonate with fully "understood" or "felt" mythological rhythms.

THE  
E • •

This is the first of a series of essays on the history of the graphic design profession. The essays are published in a series of books, each of which is a collection of essays on a single topic. The essays are published in a series of books, each of which is a collection of essays on a single topic.

By JERZYNA LIERO

"Can new design, like new science, discover phenomena that already exist in the fabric of contemporary reality?  
If so, who owns a discovery?"

Elena Lerner, *The New Design: The Cultural Context of the American Design Process*

Although science and design are both based upon experimental investigation, the comparison is not altogether straightforward, science investigates naturally occurring phenomena, while design investigates culturally created phenomena. But if such a parallel is to be made, then we might replace a falling tree by a typographic possibility and thereby ask the question "Does a typographic phenomenon exist if no one recognizes it?"

Potentially, if every graphic and typographic possibility already exists, and such is waiting to be discovered, then we need only create an appropriate context in order to bring it to any of them.

For example, consider the letters in our alphabet and how they are combined to form words. There is a finite number of combinations, or words, if we limit ourselves to words of a certain length: ten, five letters. Then, for ease of pronunciation, let's limit all words that contain a string of three or more consecutive consonants. Even with these restrictions to give some "meaning" within our understanding of words, there will be many words that will have no meaning to us. Does this mean that these are real words? Does a sequence of letters not form a word when we do not recognize its meaning?

It is important to note here that the meanings of words are not inherent in the words themselves; the meanings are arbitrary, since the same word may have different meanings in different languages. In fact, the entire concept of using letters is an arbitrary one. We could just as well have used an letters, or go letters, or thousands of characters like the Oriental cultures. Although these systems of communication and meanings are arbitrary, once they are established, they serve as the foundation for the creation of new meanings, and therefore do not appear to be as arbitrary as they really are.

As another example, consider the grid of a computer video display, or that of a laser printer resolution: each pixel on the grid can be on or off, black or white. Given a fixed resolution, again, there is a finite number of combinations that these on/off sequences will compose. If a computer is programmed to run through all of the possible combinations, some will appear to us as pure gibberish, while others will be recognized as something that we already know or might be interested in getting to know better. Even though all these combinations are randomly generated, only those few that fit into our preconceived notions of content will have meaning. Therefore, it is the meaning, and not the form itself, that has been created.

New design is the creation of new meanings; that is, new meanings for typographic possibilities. However, new meanings must be linked to existing ones. Even that design which "pushes the envelope" must build upon existing perceptions. For almost a critical review is unavoidable, the entire piece will be dismissed as complete nonsense. On the other hand, if no portion of the design is new, then it will appear to understatement that it might result in boredom and therefore be equally dismissed. Involving consumers with just the right amount of recognizable information opens their interest. By introducing these changes of meaning, design educates the consumer to the changes in culture. Thus, design is a very powerful component in controlling our individual consciousness. However, design is also a subconscious process, and it is therefore easily responsible for a designer to unconsciously alter a specific cultural context.

This process of reevaluation and adding or changing of meaning with changing contexts or environments in our popular culture that is conducive to the introduction of particular ideas. At this reevaluation changes, it makes certain ideas ripe, or "ready to be told."

In this manner, meanings change, and over time great shifts take place. Since the creation of new meanings usually occurs in the replacement, displacement or change of older meanings, we may also wonder if some meanings become obsolete. We may ask, "Does obsolescence exist in design, and can we plan obsolescence?"

It is possible to engineer the components of a car or refrigerator to break down after a certain duration of use, thereby defining the product's obsolescence. But is it possible to do this with a design style, typology, or typographic form? Unlike industrial products that have a physical life, the lifespan of a typographic possibility is purely conceptual. Design becomes obsolete as they are consumed by our culture, and subsequently forgotten in favor of other ones. Yet what was obsolete years ago is often revived from obsolescence to be assimilated or expanded upon as appropriate to fit into new cultural meanings. This process repeats itself again and again, making obsolescence a temporary state in the world of design possibilities.

Because this ongoing change is affected by many different forces from numerous directions, it is impossible to predict what will happen next, or even how long or short lived any particular design idea might be. Since the life, or level, of a design idea are dictated by its appropriateness for currently accepted ideas, it would be impossible to specifically plan the longevity of a design without also controlling these forces of style.

This evolution of meanings is also unpredictable over time. Some meanings change very quickly, like the second hand on a stopwatch, others change so slowly that we don't even see these changes, like the hour hand on a grandfather clock. These slow changing ideas are seen as timeless, while those that change quickly are perceived as being timely. The words "casualty" and "timely" often have very strong negative or positive connotations, although neither is good nor bad, per se. The value of either of these qualities lies in the appropriateness of use, and appropriateness is mostly a question of relevance: use of design concepts, or financial stability.

For example, if a coin machine is to change the signals to an air port or subway system, then a timeless design is appropriate. However, if a design can be changed every time it appears in use, say, as a decorative television placard, and especially if such change will stimulate interest and add levels of meaning to the audience, then a timely design would be appropriate.

However, more often than not, it is timelessness that is seen as most valuable. Timeless creations are seen as the result of the process of refinement, and give us the impression that we are always working towards an ultimate goal of perfection, independent of the whims of fashion. This may appear to be a laudable goal, but is a logical and progressive development. However, however, and compared to hindsight, actual events do not occur with such calm vision. For example, since we classify a design idea as being fully developed, historians then work to explain its development by referring to the appropriate chain of events. However, this process also involves the filtering out of inappropriate events; events that nonetheless occupy the same time line. The inevitability of design ideas is therefore never so apparent when we're standing on the silver road of the time line.

Although each development can be explained as an outcome of any number of preceding factors, this does not mean that any particular course of development is therefore inevitable. The somewhat arbitrary choices that are made along every step subsequently become a foundation for future developments. But there are usually many parallel, equally viable paths not taken. It is, who sees these design discoveries, if we are facilitating their existence through the appropriate context? It may be true that all design exists in the fabric of typographic possibility. However, since not all possibilities can exist at the same time, there must be some way to intelligently choose those possibilities that will have meaning, that intelligence being chosen from designers.

The discovery of a design possibility is therefore largely a matter of the designer being in the right place at the right time. However, it is the designer's ability to recognize the opportunity, the talent to apply the idea in a specific creative work, the willingness to sometimes go out on a limb, and the perseverance to sustain action that the idea has validity, that deserves claim to ownership. Because, in the end, it is the exposure to consciousness new ideas in order that gives credibility to the designer's existence.





# Letters to Christine:

## AN INTERTEXTUAL COLLABORATION

VICTOR MARCELIN  
and  
CHRISTINE DELAND

In 1991 I designed a stationary program for Victor Margolin. Victor was interested in creating an identity for himself — a design historian, and theorist — that would reflect on the Russian Constructivists (Lissitzky's poster and, at the same time, serve as a contemporary interpretation of history providing a new dimension for his correspondence). I considered Lissitzky's work carefully and tried to create a dynamic movement through the communication process. Each component of the program employs the visual motif of the black circle, white, red, and red wedge in a different way, referring not only to the poster and the Whites with the Red Wedge, but to other works by Lissitzky, such as some of the pages of the portfolio of poems Victor drew for the Red. It is rare to work with a "living" who is interested, open, and willing to experiment. Thus, the project was more of a collaboration with Victor than anything else. Knowing that no design has completely satisfied its user is the greatest reward that I could possibly desire.

CHRISTINE DELAND VICTOR MARCELIN

Four years ago, when Christine Deland was my colleague at the University of Illinois at Chicago, I asked her if she would design my stationary. I told her that I wanted to do something with it Lissitzky's poster of you and the Whites with the Red Wedge. Christine expressed an expectation with her complex design that often anticipates possibilities for ordering the written or typed text. One day while exploring these possibilities to I sat down and wrote Christine a program. The society showed me how the stationary's graphic structure creates opportunities for writing that I had never imagined. At the same time I realized that I needed to find a comfortable format within her structure. The letters reproduced in this book of design are the result of that search.

Dear Christine

I just wanted to share with you my latest logistical discovery. Only this line is in something to relate to the visual form as a visual form.

Yours

V I C T O R

Dear Christine

I promised to send you some examples of intertextual engagement with my stationary. Sometimes I feel like making a little box in the corner of the page and I do so. I feel it looks great with all the white space around it.

V I C T O R

Dear Christine

Sometimes I like to extend the lead line into a line like that that some one makes of the stationary like a column. It makes a very strong graphic impression and provides a line constant to all the curves, circles, and diagonals in the stationary itself. I never really knew how much I will have to say but if I have more to say than I can accommodate in the column, I prefer to use a second sheet of paper and make another column rather than claim the column on the first sheet. I want say that you have designed the stationary to give me a lot of choice as to how I want to shape my text. It makes writing letters much more fun because I can introduce a visual element into the text. I particularly like the way the text functions as a line against all the other elements in the stationary (a straight line, that is).

VICTOR

Victor's Long History of Letters (1971)

Dear Christine

There is something about this stationary that inclines me to write in columns rather than across the page. It makes me want to surround my text with a lot of white space and to experiment with the use of white space between the lines as well. I will continue to use this message with only one skip between lines but there are other options as well and I want to try them out on the next sheet. I have also tried to play with more complex groupings of words and I will try one out too but ultimately I am most comfortable with columns and squares of text.

Victor's Long History of Letters (1971)

Dear Christine

While time I am going to experiment with increasing and condensing the space between the lines just to see what the result looks like.

There is something about the frame you have created that makes me want to keep the text together in shapes rather than make it look too randomly scattered

on the page. I think the level of complexity in the stationary

frame is very high and it encourages me to keep my own texts organized as a hedge against chaos. What do you think?

Victor's Long History of Letters (1971)

VICTOR

Dear Christine

I want to try out a text that is made up of little boxes and see how well it works with the rest of the page. I have a hunch that if you don't want the text to be too "disorganized" as "messy up."

It took a real act of will to leave the left hand column and move over to start a new line. I really didn't want to do it but I pointed I would try to see. I really don't think it works though.

But if I move back to the left hand side of the page, I realize that you can't go home again and I would have been better off staying in my current column to begin with.

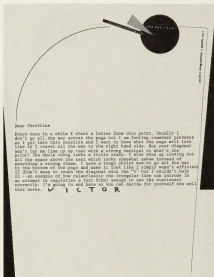
VICTOR

Victor's Long History of Letters (1971)



# Letters to Christine:

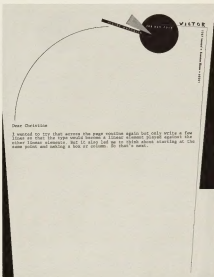
7



Dear Christine

Every once in a while I start a letter from this point. Usually I don't go all the way across the page but I am feeling somewhat nervous as I get into this exercise and I want to know what the page will look like if I want all the way to the right hand side. But your diagram wouldn't let me line up my text with a strong vertical so what's the point? The whole thing looks a little messy. I also went up drawing out all the space above the text which looks somewhat awkward instead of providing a strong frame. I have a tough choice now to go all the way to the bottom of the page and make it look like I didn't want to fill it. I don't want to touch the diagonal with the 'c' but I couldn't help it - as an example of how reluctantly the diagonal line can intrude in an attempt to regularize a text form enough to use the stationary correctly. I'm going to end here so you can decide for yourself how well this works. **VICTOR**

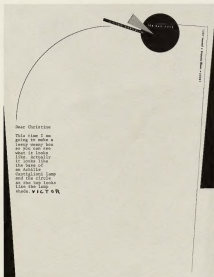
8



Dear Christine

I wanted to try that across the page routine again but only write a few lines so that the type would become a linear element played against the other linear elements. But it also led me to think about starting at the same point and making a look at columns. So that's what.

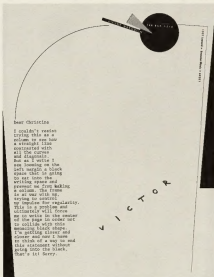
9



Dear Christine

This time I am going to make a lamp, maybe less so you can see what it looks like. Actually it looks like the base of an Ashlie. Scattered lamp and the circle as the top looks like the lamp shade. **VICTOR**

10



Dear Christine

I couldn't resist trying this as a column to see how a straight line contrasted with all the curves and diagonals. But as I write I am knowing me the left margin a block space that is going to get into the writing space and prevent me from making a column. The form is at war with me, trying to control my impulsive line regularly. This is a problem and ultimately will force me to write in the center of the page in order not to collide with those menacing black shapes. I'm getting closer and closer and now I have to think of a way to end this statement without going UNDO the black. That's it! Sorry.

